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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 000766

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SUBJECT: MFA BRIEFS AMBASSADOR ON TURKISH INTEREST IN
RESTORING CLOSE TIES TO ISRAEL

Classified By: Ambassador James B. Cunningham for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: MFA Acting Director General Yossi Gal briefed the Ambassador March 31 on Gal's visit to Turkey. Gal, who had returned from Turkey March 30, explained that a strong thread of U.S.-related material ran through his discussions. The visit was to follow up on FM Livni's meeting with Turkish FM Babacan on the margins of the NATO meeting in Brussels on March 5. Gal told the Ambassador that he met with both his MFA counterpart, Under Secretary Apakan and with Prime Ministerial Foreign Policy Advisor Ahmet Davutoglu for several hours each. According to Gal, they discussed strategies for renewing Israeli-Turkish ties through increased exchanges, differing Israeli and Turkish views on Iran and Hamas, and other regional issues. Gal said that while the Apakan seemed more cautious on Iran and Hamas, Davutoglu advocated a policy of "embrace and change." Gal cautioned Davutoglu that Iran may use Turkey's embrace to avoid international sanctions. Finally, the Turks made clear they hoped for a continued mediating role between Israel and Syria. Gal replied that the Syria track would be a matter for the new GOI to address. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Gal said the Turks stressed repeatedly their desire to turn the page, and to deepen and broaden their relationship with Israel. The Ambassador asked if there were discernible differences between Davutoglu and the MFA. Gal said there were not, with the exception of the discussion on Iran, where Davutoglu showed more support for engagement. In the discussion of regional issues, the Turks repeatedly made clear their interest in working with the U.S. and Israel as part of a triangular "strategic relationship" in the Middle East. Gal commented that he got the sense that the Turks hoped Israel would influence the U.S. to view Turkey's engagement with Israel positively prior to the President Obama's visit. Gal added that the Turks' concern about Armenia and Congressional action on the genocide measure was palpable, and they asked Israel to lobby the Administration and on the Hill against the measure. Gal added that Israel hoped President Obama, during his visit to Turkey, would follow through in promoting the bilateral relationship between Israel and Turkey.

13. (C) Regarding the bilateral relationship, Gal said that the Turks proposed a structured approach of visits and discussions focusing on four areas of cooperation: Political, Economic/Trade, Culture/Academic, and People to

People. The two sides agreed to 17 specific follow-up items, most of which Gal said were proposed by Turkey. These include visits to Israel by President Gul, the Turkish Chief of Defense (CHOD), the Minister of Agriculture, FM Babacan, and U/S Apakan (to continue the strategic dialogue discussion). In addition, Turkey proposed a visit to Israel by the Minister of Tourism to promote Israeli tourism to Turkey, which has fallen off dramatically since Erdogan's outburst at Davos. In June there will be a Joint Economic Committee meeting to promote trade. Gal said that exchanges on energy, water, and between legislatures are also being planned.

¶4. (C) On regional issues, Gal said he discussed Iraq, the EU and Iran with the GOT. The Turks expressed concern about Iranian activities in Iraq, and praised the "tight cooperation" they had now with the U.S. They also told Gal that they had improved their relationship with the Kurds and said their goal was to have Iraq rejoin the Arab community as a moderate player. On Europe, The Turks reaffirmed their intent to joint the EU.

¶5. (C) During the discussion on Iran, Gal said that both Davutoglu and Apakan expressed concern about Iran and Hamas. Davutoglu expanded on the need to engage Iran and Hamas in order to influence change in their policies, a policy that Gal described as "embrace and change." Davutoglu went on at some length about the positive effect Turkey could have throughout the region in blunting extremism, claiming it was due to Turkey's influence with Damascus that the Syrians had prevented Hizballah from launching attacks during the Gaza conflict. Davutoglu also asserted that it was due to

Turkey's influence that Hamas is not completely under Iranian control. The MFA line, on the other hand, was simply that Turkey wanted to work with the U.S. and support the international efforts on Iran. Gal warned Davutoglu that Iran was trying to use its relationship and trade with Turkey to avoid sanctions. He said Davutoglu didn't react, other than to say Turkey supports the U.S. engagement policy and the P5 plus 1.

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